Love is the theme of these lectures. Love is the greatest thing in the world, and the loss of love is the greatest tragedy.

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

A Brief Survey of Their Spiritual Significance

By JNO. GIBSON INKSTER, B.A., D.D.
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF KNOX CHURCH, TORONTO

THIS volume, embodying in permanent form Rev. Jno. Gibson Inkster's addresses on the "Seven Churches of Asia," will be welcomed by earnest Christian people. God has given to Dr. Inkster a message for the hour. He has unfolded the meaning of the letters of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches as they apply to Christians of today. These messages are intensely practical, free from all vain speculation, and eminently calculated to stir to action.

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LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

The Letters to the Seven Churches

By

Rev. Jno. Gibson Inkster, B.A., D.D.

Toronto, Canada

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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To My Mother

"Were she a star in yonder sky
She'd shed such kindly light,
That all day long I'd sit and sigh
For coming of the night."

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INTRODUCTION

This volume, embodying in permanent form, Rev. Jno. Gibson Inkster's addresses on "THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA," will be greatly welcomed by earnest Christian people. Those who had the privilege of hearing the addresses when presented by Dr. Inkster to large convention audiences will never forget the spiritual stimulus that came with the conviction of the Spirit. God has given to Dr. Inkster through the power of the Spirit a message for the hour. He has unfolded the meaning of the letters of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches as they apply to Christians of today. In the midst of prophecy, which frequently breaks down Christian love and courtesy, he has raised a standard. We are prone to think of orthodoxy as simply a matter of adherence to correct forms of doctrine and the acceptance of Scriptural statements. In describing the heresy of the heart, the loss of love for Christ, Mr. Inkster has laid his hand upon the fundamental sin of orthodox people. Some are puzzled to find churches of unquestioned loyalty to the written Word of God that are filled with worldliness and quite careless to the needs of the perishing multitudes about them let alone the dying millions of heathenism. His broad vision recognizes that both good and evil are found within the church, and with the insight of a prophet, he calls us to the Blessed Hope as the sure solution of all difficulties, while emphasizing the increasing power of evil as the Church is being conformed more and more to the world.

While pleading for a return to the first love and stressing the necessity of tenderness toward those who differ this, faith-

ful minister truly represents the sternness of God as he judges the various forms of evil. Balaamism, Nicolaitainism, Laodiceanism are limned with a skilful pen that allows no mistake in identification. The duty of each individual to open his heart to the love of God in Christ and to separate himself not only from false teaching but also from false living is pressed home with vigor. These messages are intensely practical, free from all vain speculation, and eminently calculated to stir to action.

As the pastor of a large metropolitan church, Dr. Inkster speaks from wide experience when he addresses himself to these pastoral messages. He has more than a touch of the Scotch prophetic fire, with a reverence for the Word of God and a passion for the Church of Christ as a heritage of sound Presbyterian lineage.

This book should be placed in the hands of all Christians who are troubled because of the worldliness or contention within their church. Its sane, steady influence will bring joy to all who are innocent sufferers from modern declension. The apostasy is upon us. There are some teachers abroad who only excite and disturb the faithful. Others lead the sheep into strange fields and foolish ventures. We are confident that these messages will serve to build up and not destroy. They will strengthen, not weaken the hands of every faithful pastor in every denomination.

Above all, we believe the Spirit of God has enabled our honored brother to unfold an important portion of Scripture for the benefit of this generation. Since a special blessing is given to those who read and hear the words of the prophecy contained in the Apocalypse, surely the author and readers of this volume will together enjoy the blessing of God.

WALTER M. TURNBULL.

PREFACE

While I was minister to that noble congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, Victoria, B. C., I gave a course of Sunday evening lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ. I only devoted one lecture to the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor.

When I came to Knox Church, Toronto, I began the same course of lectures the first Sunday night in 1921. On account of the unsettled state of the weather I decided to prolong the lectures on the seven letters, hoping by the end of February the weather would moderate and the people would get the benefit of a continuous course.

The exigency proved fortunate for me. I became interested in the development of the theme—it gripped my soul. I pray that through the gracious power of the Holy Spirit it also touched the people.

These lectures have been delivered in part or altogether, in Toronto, Boston, Old Orchard, New York, St. Paul, Nyack, Beulah Beach, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa, Peterborough and Hamilton and broadcasted by the Y. M. C. A. Dr. W. M. Turnbull, who heard these lectures, suggested that I publish them; the late Rev. Frederic H. Senft and Rev. D. J. Fant also made the same suggestion. At their united instigation I readily assented in the hope that the greatness and importance of love might be magnified. Love is the theme of these lectures. Love is the greatest thing in the world and the loss of love is the greatest tragedy.

I am indebted to many writers on the Book of Revelation—most of all to my dear, dear friend—that great man and saint of God—Rev. John L. Campbell, D.D., and his book, "The Patmos Letters."

I am also indebted to my own people in Knox Church to whom these lectures were first delivered, who so kindly received them and many of whom asked that they be published.

Last and chiefest of all I am indebted to my dear wife for reading the proofs and for many valuable suggestions—literary and otherwise. J. G. I.

Knox Church, Toronto, Canada.

I

THE FIRST LAPSE

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. —*Revelation 2: 1-7.*

THE FIRST LAPSE

The vision which John saw at Patmos was a vision of the Person and Glory of the Lord—Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour of man—Who was crucified and buried, rose and ascended and who is coming again in power and great glory. The Book of Revelation is a Revelation—not of John the Divine or any other human being—but of that glorious Person. In reading the book we may discover some wonderful coincidences between the statements in the book and certain current events. A study of these coincidences—which are really fulfillings of prophecy—will be arresting and inspiring; but if we miss the Revelation of the glory of the Lord we shall miss the main message of the book.

When Christ came to earth the first time He humbled Himself—He took upon Himself the form of a servant and became obedient unto death. Further, though He came unto His own, His own received Him not—*they* humbled Him; they crucified Him on the Cross. But, He is coming again. When Christ comes to earth the sceond time, He will come with power and great glory.

After John had the first glimpse of the glory of this vision, he then received these letters to the seven churches in Asia-Minor. Jesus Christ indited these letters, John was merely the amanuensis. These letters, therefore, are divinely and verbally inspired.

The primary purpose of these letters was particular—almost personal. They were sent as messages to these seven churches. Had these letters no other purpose, they would be of little interest and less value to us, living in this Western Hemisphere in the year of our Lord 1926. But they have a two-fold sec-

ondary purpose: (a) These letters have a spiritual message and therefore are universal—they have a message for all churches, in all places, for all time. (b) These letters have also a prophetical message; i. e., we have in these letters, in bold and brief outline, a history of the seven periods of the church in this age—a history of the Dawn, Development and Doom of Christendom. This last aspect or purpose of these letters will be seen more in detail in our subsequent studies.

These letters were sent to these churches, not because they were the most important, but because they were most representative. As we study these letters in this representative aspect, we come to understand more fully their purpose and scope.

In this letter to Ephesus we have a description of the church during the Apostolic Period of her history—broadly speaking, the first century.

Ephesus was a great pagan city. She reached the zenith of her greatness during the time she was under Roman rule. She was then known as "the light of Asia." Today she is a squalid village—she did not remember, repent or reform and so her light has gone out—darkness and doom have fallen upon her. It is a fearful thing when God calls on men to remember, repent and reform and they refuse to give heed.

In this letter, Christ is represented as the bearer and bringer of light—"He holdeth the seven stars in his right hand and walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." As He comes and appears in this characteristic and representative capacity He proclaims the message. He describes the life and work of the church at Ephesus. It is a wonderful record of life and work. Let us examine it.

In the first place, Christ *commends* this church. He praises her for her work, her labor and her patience. He praises her because she is intolerant of evil men. He praises her because

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she cannot endure false doctrine. In addition, He praises her because she continued steadfast—she endured patiently and did not faint.

This is a divinely inspired and detailed description, not only of this church at Ephesus, but also of the apostolic church during the first century. During this period the church was not only growing in grace, she was also successfully resisting two subtle outside influences:—(a) Judaism and the ceremonial law, (b) Paganism and immorality.

Was there ever a more splendid description of a great church than this? Was there ever greater and more well-merited praise than this given to any church? This is what we would call today a great fundamental orthodox, evangelical church—a church that is a beehive of activities, a church which hates evil men, evil practices and evil teaching. Surely this church is a model for all churches for all time.

"*Never-the-less*—what an ominous transition word—there is a fly in the ointment. "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee." After such an array of virtues, it seems a pity that there should be anything to mar the perfection. But, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth must be told." There are few who can endure the truth—and that seldom. One Sunday night the late D. L. Moody said to a group of preachers gathered around the supper table: "Let us open our hearts to each other—let us tell each other his faults—'speaking the truth in love.'" Before the process had been well begun the host found himself in a hornet's nest—the preachers could not bear the truth.

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"—thou hast left thy first love. Friend, let me ask you to ponder these words. Buy a pot of red ink and doubly underline them in your own Bible. Read and reread

them on your knees. "Thou hast left thy first love." This is the sin of the Saints. This is the failing of the Fundamentalists. This is the heresy of the heart—by far the worst kind of heresy. These members of the church at Ephesus had works, but not the work of faith; they had patience, but not the patience of hope; they had labor, but not the labor of love. They hated evil men, evil practices, evil teaching, but they had left their first love—they were good haters, but they were poor lovers. There was something wrong in their hearts, and "out of the heart are the issues of life."

"The heart's aye the part aye,
That maks us right or wrang."

This heresy of the heart is a root sin. As we shall see in the subsequent letters, the sequel of this sin is terrible. The Bride here begins to lose her love for the Bridegroom. She is not lost, but she has fallen.

"Remember therefore from whence thou hast fallen, and repent and do the first works." Thank God all is not lost! The conditions and consequences are sad enough, but there is still hope—if she will remember, repent and reform.

These words are addressed to the believer; he is born again, but he has become carnally minded, but he is a babe in Christ. To such an one Christ says: Remember and Repent and Reform—that is the divine order, reform comes after repentance—works come after faith.

Friend, let me ask you: Do these words apply to you? Do they touch you at the quick? Have you left your first love? Is there any hate in your heart eating into it like a canker? If there is, you must remember from whence you have fallen and repent and reform—and you may. There is hope.

When the Pilgrim lost his scroll and got into trouble, he returned to where he had lost it, found it, and went on his way rejoicing. When the Prodigal had wasted all his substance in riotous living, and found himself in want and misery, he went all the way back home and found peace and happiness where he had left them. There are children of God wandering in the wilderness of sin and misery today—far away from home. They are poor and wretched and miserable, just because they have left their first love. The church today is as impotent as she is because she has left her first love. Love is the greatest thing in the world. " 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest." Nothing can resist it. Hate is impotent. Read 1 Corinthians 13. Then read, "The greatest thing in the world," by Henry Drummond, and you will see what love is and what love can do.

"Or else"—another ominous transition word—"or else I will come to thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent."

Darkness fell upon the church at Ephesus because she did not repent. The light that was in her became darkness—and "if the light that is in thee be darkness how great is that darkness?" The condition was sad, but the consequence was sadder. And yet, we are only beginning to see the sequel of this sin of the saints—this heresy of the heart.

Friend, let me ask you again—as I ask myself: Is there any root of bitterness in your heart? Does hate or ill-will or a grudge exist where love once existed? Do you ever sing—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?"

or this—

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!"

If you ever sing these words—if you ever feel or think in this way, no matter how active you may be in Christian work, no matter how much you may hate evil persons, practices or preaching—remember from whence you have fallen, you have left your first love.

That love must be restored if you are to be used by God in the Power of the Holy Spirit. There is hope of restoring that love if you will Remember and Repent, with godly repentance and sorrow for sin. The sinner must repent before he can be saved. The believer—the carnally-minded believer—must repent before he can have this lost love restored; he must be purged before he can be purified.

At the close of the letter, Christ issues the call: "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Note well that word "overcometh." It is used in each of the seven letters. It is a pregnant word. The overcomers are wonderful people. Overcome what? A saint who has left his first love must overcome pride, self-esteem, self-will, self-deception and such like sins before he can ever hope to enter the paradise of God and eat of the tree of life. It would be a terrible thing if the saint who hates, who is vain, or who is self-willed, were to eat of the tree of life and immortalize these sins. But it can't be done. God won't permit it.

This lost love must somehow be found before you can enter the paradise of God and eat of the tree of life. Praise God, that lost love can be found. When you begin to seek for that lost love you will find the Father waiting to be gracious—waiting to restore that lost love and with it the joy of His salvation. If you will Remember and Repent, that lost love, by the infinite grace of Almighty God, will be found and restored.

II

BETWEEN THE MILLSTONES

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

—*Revelation 2: 8-11.*

This letter gives us in bold and brief outline that period in church history which is known as the time of the ten persecutions. The letter to Ephesus describes the apostolic period in church history. In that period we saw the church, the Bride of Christ, coming forth: "fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners." But the Bride fell—she "left her first love." She fell, not from the right hand; but from the love of God. With the loss of that love she lost much of her fragrance and fruitfulness.

This was the beginning of the great apostasy. This is the sin of the saints, the failing of the fundamentalist and the heresy of the heart. Heresies of the head are bad—wrong ideas are bad—but heresies of the heart are infinitely worse. It is important to speak the truth; but it is more important to speak the truth *in love*. Oh, the sorrow of heart caused by unkindness and hate.

In this letter we shall see the beginning of the sequel of this sin—the first result of this apostasy. Study the sin and observe the inevitable sequel.

Smyrna was a city in Asia Minor founded by the Greeks in 1000 B. C. It was one of three great rival cities—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos. Here the immortal Homer was born. His name is still seen on some of the ancient coins. The city was destroyed in 600 B. C. and for 300 years was dead. Reëstablished by Lysimachus it soon outdistanced its rivals and far excelled its former greatness—"was dead and is alive again." It was the trusted friend of Rome. Cicero called it "our faithful ally." It was beautiful for situation, facing the sea and having Mount Pagos for a background.

To the human eye and mind, the city was Beautiful and Faithful; but inwardly it was a city full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. Its great civic festivals were characterized by drunkenness, reveling and other revolting sins.

Smyrna is a great city today. It has a population of 300,000 and is a center of industry and commerce and especially of much religious work and missionary endeavour. The lamp of Smyrna may, at times, have burned low; but it has never entirely gone out.

The church at Smyrna could not be praised for her works,—she had no works to be praised,—she only had suffering, she was poor and persecuted. The angel of this church was the aged Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who perished for the faith. He represents the suffering of this church and of this period in church history. Smyrna suffered because Ephesus left her first love. This is the first sequel to the sin of the saints. Sooner or later suffering will follow sin. We are suffering because others have sinned and others will suffer because we are sinning. This is a solemn, but sad, fact—"the mills of the gods grind slow, but they grind exceeding small."

Christ, the writer of this letter, appears in the character of Him who is "the first and the last, who was dead, and is alive"—the eternal and immortal. He is the preëxistent one. He was dead and buried; but He arose and is alive for evermore.

This is the One who says to the saints at Smyrna—"I know." He writes with full knowledge and out of a complete personal experience. *I* know all about the hypocrisy of the Jew and the tyranny of the Roman. I know how you are slandered by those who call themselves Jews, but who are a mere synagogue of satan.

There is no word of blame in this letter, it is all praise, and compassion. The poverties and persecutions had come

on this church through no fault of hers, but because Ephesus had left her first love—had become apostate.

This apostasy is the root of all evil. We might well pause here a moment and think of the awful character and consequence of this sin—loss of love. Those apostolic saints, it seems, were good haters—they hated evil men, they hated evil teaching, they hated evil practices—but they were poor lovers, —they lost their love. The sufferings of Smyrna and all the subsequent sufferings of the saints is the sequel to this sin of the saints. It is indeed an awful thing for a saint to lose his love.

He who wrote this letter suffered for the same reason. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He had been slandered by these same Jews and persecuted by the same Romans. He knew, from experience, something of the agony of spirit of those to whom He was writing. He knew the depth of their degradation and the malignity of their enemies. He knew all that; because the saints in His day had left their first love.

Knowing all this in His own experience and in theirs, He says: "But you are rich." As we read these words we wonder and say: Surely this is carrying paradox to the limit, surely this is mere mockery. Laodicea said she was rich; Christ said she was poor. But here He says to poor and persecuted Smyrna: You are rich.

This is no mockery or paradox—this is simple Gospel truth. Smyrna was rich, she had a heritage which could not be taken from her. Every saint has a like heritage. Henceforth there is laid up for him a crown of glory which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to him at that day.

The letter continues with words of counsel. The writer issues a solemn charge: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Humanly speaking, there was much cause for

fear; because the devil would cast some of them into prison that they might be tried. Further they would have tribulation ten days. There is a reference here to the ten persecutions of this period in church history. If God is not their refuge and strength, there is much cause for fear. If He is, then they could say: "Therefore will we not fear.....for the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Then He adds: "Be thou faithful unto death." This is possible for the saint. God never asks a child to do the impossible—He will not suffer him to be tempted beyond that he is able. Christ does not say here: Be powerful, be successful, be eloquent. These things may be beyond the saint, they certainly were beyond the saints of Smyrna. He says: be faithful.

One thing we know for certain about the aged Polycarp (the angel of this church) is that *he* was faithful unto death. As he was being led to the stake the proconsul, who was impressed by his venerable appearance, whispered in his ear: "Revile Christ, deny Him and I shall set thee free!" The saint answered: "Four score and six years have I served Him. He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King and Saviour who saved me?"

The temptation of the poor and persecuted saint is to give in, to lose heart, to become fearful and faithless. Therefore Christ says: Be fearless and faithful. And to those heroes of the faith—to those who listen to His counsel He gives a twofold promise: I will give you the crown of life and you shall not be hurt by the second death.

There is a Hereafter and there is a reward for the saint. We do well, these days, to put more emphasis on other-worldliness. There is danger of listening too eagerly to the modern cry: "We don't want to hear about the next world, let us learn to live in this!" Christ's answer to this is: Be fearless, be faith-

ful and I will crown you and give you life everlasting. There is another world, and we must not allow this world to dominate to the exclusion of that world.

Habits tend to form themselves into character and character always tends to fixedness. There are two, and only two destinies—it will be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked. In the light of these facts how solemn are the words of Scripture: "He that is filthy let him be filthy still, he that is righteous let him be righteous still, he that is holy let him be holy still."

> In the cold grave to which we haste,
> There are no acts of pardon passed,
> But fixed the doom of all remains,
> And everlasting silence reigns.

But

> As long as life its term extends,
> Hope's blest dominion never ends;
> For while the lamp holds on to burn,
> The greatest sinner may return.

He that is faithful shall receive the crown of life, and he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. Paul was looking for and was sure of that crown and that life. James and Peter looked for that crown and that life. All the saints and martyrs who loved His appearing looked for that crown and that life. They are wearing that crown and luxuriating in that life in the glory land today—Praise His name.

Polycarp got a glimpse of that crown and that life; for, when he was waiting for the fires to be kindled he was heard praying this prayer: "O Father, I bless Thee that thou hast counted me worthy of this day and this crown. I thank Thee that I can put my lips to this cup of Christ. I thank Thee for the sure hope of Resurrection and for the incorruptible life of heaven. I praise Thee for all Thy soul-giving benefits,

and I glorify Thee through our eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, through Whom and in the Holy Ghost be glory to Thee for ever and ever. Amen."

It is this vision of the crown and life that helps the saint to understand the mystery of life and the riddle of existence. It helps him to solve the problems of poverty and persecution. Keeping his eye on that crown, the saint sees a meaning and purpose in slander and suffering. Having assurance of that life, he can by faith hear the "well done good and faithful servant"—out of the persecution comes the crown, out of the poverty comes the riches.

All this is for him, and for him only, who is fearless and faithful—for him who overcomes. There is no such promise for him who is conquered—for him who is fearful and faithless. "No pain no palm, no gloom no glory, no thorns no throne, no cross no crown." The captain of our salvation was Himself tempted in all points like as we are—He was perfected through suffering.

"Heaven is not mounted to on wings of ease,
Nor doth the unthankful happiness of youth move hitherward,
But floats from bloom to bloom,
With earth's warm patch of sunshine well content.
'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,
Whose golden rungs are our calamities;
Whereon our firm feet planting, nearer God
The spirit moves and hath its eyes unsealed."

"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."

III

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

—*Revelation 2: 12-17.*

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

The theme of these seven letters is: The sin of the saints and the sequel. The sin was, "Thou hast left thy first love"—the Bride of Christ had fallen, not from the right hand of God; but she had fallen from the high place which she had first occupied—her affection was blighted and chilled. As we saw in the letter to Smyrna, the sequel to that sin was:—the church suffered—persecution fell upon her. In this letter we shall see a further sequel to that sin.

Pergamos, according to Pliny, was "the most illustrious city" in Asia Minor. According to Ramsay, it was "a really royal city." Its fame was due, not to its commercial greatness, but to its political activities. Pergamos was a cathedral city, an university center and had a vice-regal residence. According to contemporary historians, it was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole land." In the estimation of the Prophetic Historian, it was "the seat of Satan."

How often does the judgment of God reverse the judgment of man—"man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart." He sees what is hidden beneath and says of this "most illustrious city," this "royal city"—this is Satan's seat.

The period of church history which this letter covers is the period after the persecutions and prior to the middle ages—approximately 300 to 500 A. D. It was the time beginning with Constantine, the time when the state threw the mantle of her protection over the church,—the time that most unholy of all unholy alliances was formed between the church and the state.

I can well remember reading the history of that period for

the first time. As I read the story of the persecutions, all about the suffering and martyrdom of the saints, my heart was sore and the cry went up: "O Lord, how long?" What a feeling of relief came over me when I read of the conversion and conquests of Constantine, when state protection took the place of state persecution. Now, as I look back on that period in the light of all history and especially in the light of dispensational truth, I regard that change of attitude of the state as one of the greatest calamities that ever befell the Christian church.

It was at that time the church began to lose her heavenly vision. She had left her first love and she began to love the world. The human heart, like nature, hates a vacuum. It must center its affection on something or someone. Hence when the church lost her love for God she began to love the world. This is true of the individual as it is of the church. When the believer begins to love the world the reason is because his love for God is growing cold.

It was at this time the Arian heresy began to appear in the church; it was at this time the premillennial view of Christ's coming began to give way to the post-millennial view; it was at this time the church began to build fine palaces for her priests and cathedrals for her people; it was at this time the saints began to lose their pilgrim vision; it was at this time the church began to settle down and enjoy the comforts and luxuries of the world—she had passed through the persecutions and was now enjoying the pleasures of life for a season.

Satan now began to pursue a different policy. He saw that persecution had failed. The blood of the martyr had become the seed of the church. He now appears in a more subtle and dangerous rôle, he appears as an angel of light. Forthwith he "arranged" a marriage—it was in no sense a love affair. It was an arrangement between the organized church and the

world. "The Bride of Christ became the concubine of Cæsar." In this transaction we see the doctrine of Balaamism and the doctrine of Nicolaitanism working themselves out, inside the church.

When Christ wrote this letter, to the church where Satan's seat is, He speaks as the One who has the sharp sword with two edges. He is dealing now with a church who has allied herself with a military power, hence he uses the symbol of military power—the sword. The meaning of this is made plain in Scripture. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God with which the saint has to fight all his battles and quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

It was with this weapon that Eden was guarded. Christ won all His battles with this sword—"It is written." Paul won all his victories with the Word of God. Every minister of the Gospel, every missionary of the Cross and every teacher of the truth has fought and won by using the sword of the Spirit. It is quick and powerful. When will we learn that we shall always suffer defeat whenever we use any other weapon and we shall always win when we use this one. Let us once for all learn this lesson and let us learn to use this weapon.

But Christ does not appear only in this stern character. He also speaks words of gracious commendation to this church which dwelt in this corrupt, capital, cathedral city—this center of paganism. This church was true to her Lord and kept the faith—"thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied the faith." Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr who was slain among you.

God has never left Himself without a witness. He has always had a faithful remnant. He had it in the days of Constantine, He had it in the dark ages, and He has it in these evil days.

But God is faithful and so He has words of condemnation

as well as commendation. This church tolerated false teaching. It appeared in two forms. 1. Balaamism. Balaam was a pagan king who hired the prophet Balak to curse Israel. In other words he tried to destroy Israel by attacking her from the outside. He failed in this and so he began, at the suggestion of Balak, to attack Israel from the inside. He married the sons of the enemy to the daughters of Israel. He knew a man's worst foes are those of his own household. This was done and history tells us what were the awful consequences. 2. Nicolaitanism. This evil consisted in the domination of the people by the priests. Both of these evil practices led to serious sins and blighting heresies.

The resulting sins (which were rampant) were fornication and idolatry—most assuredly heinous sins. We shall see more of them in subsequent letters. These sins were the direct result of false teaching. Creed and conduct are inseparably yoked together and no man can separate them. The process may be slow and imperceptible; but whenever error is allowed to creep in, sin soon follows.

Instances of this are sadly common, both in the life of the church and the individual. Here is the case of a young man who enters the university to prepare himself for the foreign field. By the time his course is finished error has been allowed to creep in. He has left his first love and lost his faith. He decides to enter another profession. There he forms unholy alliances which eventually mar his life, blight the home and break human hearts.

The influences of environment are tremendous—outside evil is hard to resist; but the greatest dangers to character and eternal destinies are those which come from within.

In the ultimate issue the church herself is responsible—the sin is hers. Therefore the church must repent. Judgment must

begin with the house of God. Christ says, in this letter: "Repent or else I will come unto thee quickly, and I will fight against thee with the word of my mouth." Pergamos did not repent and her light went out.

The church today must purge herself of false teaching. This purifying process cannot be done from the outside. The evil is inside—the sin is within the camp,—and the cleansing must begin, continue and be carried through by the church, until all error and false teaching are put out. Creed and conduct are so closely wedded together and so vitally related that to tolerate false teaching means before long to tolerate immoral practices.

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he which receiveth it." This is a wonderful promise with a mysterious meaning. There are two parts to it—the new name and the hidden manna.

The reference to the new name is to a precious stone which was carried in the folds of the Jews' robes. On the stone a name was engraved which signified some revelation from God. To the Jew, who was faithful, a fresh revelation was given—something was added to what he already had. What a full and fresh revelation was given to man from God when these words were engraved on the tables of the heart: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save His people from their sins." To the unfaithful Jew this meant something worse than nothing; but to the faithful Jew it meant everlasting salvation—a complete revelation of God.

This is still true. To the faithful saint there come fresh revelations of God and new blessings. It is of supreme importance that the body of Christ, and every member of that body, should rid itself of all error and false teaching—should contend earnestly for the faith. Then, as in the days of the

pilgrim fathers, "fresh light and truth will break forth out of His holy word."

The reference to the hidden manna is easier to understand. Manna—except the pot which was kept in the ark—always decayed at the close of day. The children of Israel were given day by day their daily manna. If they attempted to keep a portion in store for the coming day, it decayed. Jesus is our manna, hidden from human sight; but to the saint He is the bread of life. The natural man imagines all the pleasures of life are hidden in the material world. But the pleasures of this world do not satisfy.

One of the saddest pictures, and truest to life, is that of the great Scottish artist, Noel Paton—"The Pursuit of Pleasure." The poor victim thinks, each after the other, pleasure is just within his reach. As he stretches out his hand, it eludes his grasp and presently is gone from him forever. He falls in the pursuit and is trampled under the feet of those coming after him in the same pursuit.

How vastly different it is with the true believer,—the child of God, the faithful witness. Those who have found Christ the bread of life, the hidden manna, have found that which satisfies. "In his presence is fullness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures for ever more."

IV

SETTLED ON THE LEES

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

And I will give him the morning star.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. —*Revelation 2: 18-29.*

SETTLED ON THE LEES

The period of church history, which is given here in broad prophetic outline, is that known as the "middle, or dark ages." It extended, approximately, from 500 to 1500 A. D. It was the time of the rise and the supremacy of the Papacy. Nicolaitanism—priest-craft or ecclesiastical error—was firmly established; and Balaamism—ethical error and corruption—was rampant. Evil was everywhere predominant in the church; while the faithful were a mere remnant.

During this period, the sequel to the sin of the saints was seen in all its horrible baldness—sinking to its lowest depths.

Thyatira was a city built on a plain. It had no natural protection from the enemy—they therefore had to erect artificial fortifications. It was a place, not so much of commercial repute as of military fame. Its trade consisted in the production of bronze and purple. Each one of these three facts has an economic, an ecclesiastical and an ethical significance which we can only allude to here; but which will appear, indirectly at least, as we study the text of the letter and the history of the period.

The evil which we saw, beginning in Ephesus and culminating in Thyatira, runs on to the end of this present evil age. We shall deal with its details as we take up the study of the next three letters. Ephesus hated evil, Pergamos tolerated it, Thyatira taught it.

> "Sin is a monster of such hideous mien,
> That to be hated needs but to be seen;
> But seen too oft—familiar with its face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

Christ, who indicted this letter, appears as "the Son of God, who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like

fine brass." He is dealing with a most crucial and serious situation—hence he appears as God, the omniscient and omnipotent one. He has eyes of flame with which He can see the evil, and He has feet of brass with which He can crush it.

His first words are words of commendation: "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." There are works and there are graces to be praised; but the works encircle the graces. Man *will* emphasize works. Ephesus decreases in love—Thyatira increases in works. That invariably happens. Just as soon as we leave our first love, just so soon do we begin to magnify self and emphasize good works.

This is a long letter—the longest of the seven—and yet the writer finds little to commend; but He who sees all things detects what little good there is, and praises it. Like Nathaniel, there may be little in us to commend—it may be difficult to detect and harder to understand; but He who sees and knows detects the good, understands and commends it.

Christ then utters His words of condemnation. The sin of this church—the sin of this period of church history—required the knife. Christ's great heart was made sore by this sin and so He proceeds to lay it open. He says, "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel." Jezebel was a clever, cruel and utterly unscrupulous woman. She was the daughter of a pagan king and the wife of an apostate king. She massacred the prophets and then became herself a false prophetess. She may not have started, but she surely fostered and encouraged the soul-destroying sins of idolatry and fornication.

We find in woman what is best and worst in the human race. She has it in her to rise to the highest heights and to sink to the lowest depths. It is only a tradition, but it is a most likely and illuminating one. The tradition is this: the church in

Thyatira was begun in the house of Lydia—the seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, whose heart the Lord opened under the preaching of Paul at Philippi. She was one of the best of women. Now this church, which was started by this saint, *suffers* this woman Jezebel—one of the worst of women.

Women were the best friends the church had at its beginning. Women will be the bitterest enemies the church will have in her last days. It was three women who were the most loyal friends of Christ in the days of his passion—they were last at the Cross and they were first at the grave. These three women watched by the cradle as the church was rocked in her infancy. The three greatest enemies which the church has today are the teachings of Theosophy, Spiritualism and Christian Science. When the organized church will be lying in her coffin it will be the spectres of three women—Madam Blavatsky, Margaret Fox and Mary Baker Eddy, that will be standing by.

O women! when you have got away from Christ and been left to yourselves what disasters you have wrought! But when joined to Christ, and with Him as your lover, what victories you have won! Men need Christ it is true; but there is a sense in which women need Christ more than men. Who can ever tell what Christ has been to women and what women have been to Christ.

Christ says here: "Thou sufferest this woman to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Let us understand what the character of this apostasy really was.

This idolatry of which Jezebel was guilty involved all the churches. Therefore He will "cast her into a bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation.....and He will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts."

Idolatry in the sight of God consists in anything which comes in between God and the immortal soul. In the case of the Roman church of the middle ages it took the form of worshiping saints, keeping holy days, wearing certain vestments and such like. Fornication in the sight of God consists in any illicit intercourse with the world. In the case of this same church, it took the form of ambition for temporal power—the establishing of that most unholy alliance between church and state.

History records the sad lapses of the Roman church into these sins— these awful sequels to the sin of the saints—the loss of love. I wonder if the Protestant church, which is so ready to rebuke Rome, is herself free from these two sins—Idolatry and Fornication? Let us see.

Organized religion, whether Roman or Protestant, is very much the same. Idolatry is seen today in the Protestant church. In one branch, it takes the form of worshiping ritual and vestments; in another branch, it takes the form of worshiping dogma and creed; in another branch, it takes (or took) the form of worshiping an experience and the penitent form; and in another branch, it takes the form of worshiping an ordinance or a rite. These, and such things as these, come between God and the soul—the sin and the sequel are invariable —loss of love invariably leads to idolatry.

Similarly, fornication is seen today in the Protestant church; namely, illicit intercourse with the world. Instead of depending on supernatural power to convert the soul, transform the life and change the community, the Protestant church is turning her pulpit into a platform, she is forming deputations, waiting on the legislatures and seeking to force through, what she calls, sumptuary and ethical legislation. She is entering into illicit intercourse with the world.

When will the church of the living God see that, so long as she carries on this kind of campaign, so long as she expends her time and energy on action along these lines, she is like the mighty engine which has got off the rails, or she is like the majestic ship which has got on the rocks.

The call is sent out to this church, "I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." She repented not—her character and her doom were fixed. As time passes slowly, silently and steadily, the awful fact begins to appear—organized religion is becoming fixed. Humanly speaking the apostate church can neither be reformed nor destroyed. If the Pope and all the cardinals of Rome were to meet in solemn conclave, if all the Bishops and Moderators of Christendom were to meet in high assembly, and resolve either to reform or destroy organized religion—the Roman and Protestant churches—their resolution would be as a piece of waste paper. The staggering and Scriptural fact is: both in church and state, man has brought into existence an organization, a system, which has grown too big and too powerful for him—it has got beyond his control. The whole economic and ecclesiastical order is— according to the teaching of Scripture, human experience and history—now heading for its doom. So far as man is concerned there is no hope. Lord Grey in his "Twenty-five Years" says: "The future, the life of civilization, will depend upon whether a wiser and more instructed spirit prevails now than it did before the experience of the Great War; if it does not, our present civilization will perish." The human spirit, apart from God, never has become wiser or better instructed. The next war will demonstrate that the human spirit is still more foolish and ignorant.

Some one asks: What then shall we do? Is there no hope? Yes, there is a blessed and most glorious hope. Christ says to the Remnant: Hold fast till I come. When He comes

"He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity."

Up to this time—to the middle ages,—God was dealing with the church as a whole. After this time, he deals only with "the rest"—the Remnant. The Remnant of this period in church history were the Waldenses and the Albigenses who held fast and overcame. "Unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden."

To this faithful remnant—to those who overcame and kept His works to the end—He says, "I will give power over the nations; and they shall rule them with a rod of iron." This is what organized religion has been trying to get, and to do, ever since she took her eyes off the supernatural and set them on the natural. It has been seeking temporal power. Organized religion will never get this; but the faithful remnant will rule the nations—"know ye not that the saints shall judge the earth."

A further reward is reserved for the faithful saint: "I will give him the morning star." The morning star is the star which is seen by the early watcher just before the day dawns and the sun rises. Everybody sees the rising sun; but only a few—the Remnant—see the morning star. He who is looking for the morning star must rise early and watch for it. At that morning watch you cannot see the sun, but you can see the sign of his appearing.

When the Son of Righteousness appears, all shall see Him —"every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." The

Son of Righteousness has not yet appeared; but the faithful already see the morning star—they see the sign of His appearing. The signs of the coming of the Lord are clear and unmistakable—the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet is appearing in all so-called civilized nations of the earth. Let it suffice here to mention one. The Great War itself was not so much an illustration of this as the unmentionable atrocities which were committed on human beings. "Then shall appear the sign of the son of man in the heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory."

The idolatry and fornication described above are spectacles unspeakably sad; but we are not as those who have no hope. They are the awful and sad harbingers—they are the signs of the appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. In the light of these facts, in view of this blessed and glorious hope, Christ says to the faithful—the Remnant—"hold fast till I come.....He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."

V

DEAD AND ALIVE

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be careful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

And remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.—*Revelation 3: 1-6.*

DEAD AND ALIVE

In the letter to the church in Thyatira we have a description, in prophetic outline, of the church before the Reformation. In this letter to the church in Sardis we have a similar description of the church after the Reformation. In a word, we have a description of a perfect Papacy and a perfect Protestantism, and in both we see the sequel to the sin of the saints.

The virtues and the vices which are seen in the church in Sardis run on to the end of the age. Two streams were started during this period of church history. The one stream was the Reformation. This was a divine movement—a spiritual movement and a revival of religion. The other stream was Protestantism. This was a human movement, which repeated, as we shall see, many of the evils of the Roman church. The divine movement is seen issuing in the letter to the church in Philadelphia which embraces the great evangelical movements and the missionary enterprise. The human movement is seen issuing in the letter to the church in Laodicea which embraces the teaching of rationalism and issues in spiritual deadness.

Sardis, with its acropolis on Mount Molus, was a strongly fortified city. It seemed impregnable. But Cyrus, seeing a man descend the precipitous rock by a secret set of steps, led his army, one by one, up that steep ascent, to a place on the walls of the citadel which had been left unguarded and took the city from the wealthy Croesus. The capture was due to overconfidence. As so often happens, their strength was their weakness. They were not "watchful" and the enemy came on them as a thief in the night.

Twice was Sardis taken in this way. The church in Sardis would readily understand these words in this letter: "Be watch-

ful and strengthen the things which remain. . . . If therefore those shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

How these words echo in our ears in these last days—how necessary it is for us to watch, for we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh! Be ye therefore ready, for in such an hour as ye think not He will come. Amid such seasons of uncertainty it becomes us to watch.

In inditing this letter, Christ appears as "He that hath the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." This signifies the perfection and fullness of the power of the Spirit to save and to sanctify. It signifies perfection of light and perfection of heat—perfect knowledge and perfect zeal.

A ministry, to be one of power, must be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One and only leader of the church. He alone can save the church from disaster and ruin. Education, organization, legislation or culture cannot do it. We must have a Spirit-filled ministry *and* we must have a Spirit-filled membership in order that the church shall exist and function.

The church of the Reformation entered upon a glorious and an untried opportunity; but the one thing she needed, above all else, was loyalty to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost with power on the church—according to the promise: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." There can be no doubt about that glorious fact. His power was felt, not only by the members of the church; but His power was seen by the world. In this power the early church went forward from victory unto victory. The Holy Spirit was the enthroned leader of the early church. But the Roman Catholic church, of the middle ages, dethroned the Holy Spirit from His place of leadership

and gave it to the Pope. The Protestant church on the other hand never enthroned the Holy Spirit as her leader. All the troubles, all the worries and all the weaknesses of the Protestant church are due to the fact that man has usurped or refused the leadership which is the prerogative of God the Holy Ghost.

The first words spoken to this church are words of condemnation: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead . . . I have not found thy works perfect before God." This church had a name—she was famous, she was known all over the land. Wherever one went this church was spoken of. "Thou livest." She was what is called "a live church." No false teachers were found here. There was a fine plant, and complete equipment. Something was going on in this church all the time. The doors were open every day and all the day. Socials, soirees and soup kitchens were running all the year round.

This was the "name" this church had—this was her reputation. But *He* who sees beneath the surface and into the heart of things says: "She is dead." This is the description which Christ gives of organized Protestant religion, at its inception. It had zeal without knowledge—heat without light. Her members, at heart, were degenerate. What was the matter? The Holy Spirit was not enthroned.

Is this a true description of the Protestant church today? What are the signs of life? They are three: *Growth, Interest* and *Unity*. The organism which does not *grow* is a deformity; or, what is worse, atrophy has set in. Has the Protestant church power, in proportion to her size, compared with apostolic churches? In other words, has she really grown? I leave it to the reader to answer. The *interest* of a living church is revealed in a passion for salvation and sanctification. Is that the ruling passion of the Protestant church? Again I leave

the question unanswered. Life means coördination and *unity*. Death means discord and disintegration. There is no room for a question here. It can be truthfully said, whatever else the Protestant church can say, one thing she cannot say is: "We are not divided."

This then was the physical, moral and spiritual condition of the church at Sardis, and this is the condition of the Protestant church of today. This is the sad sequel to the sin of the saints—the condition of Sardis is the result of Ephesus leaving her first love. But, bless His name, this condition can be changed—she can repent.

"For while the lamp holds on to burn
The greatest sinner may return."

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent." The church in Sardis was told to do three things:—Remember, Retain, Repent.

Remember *how*, not *what*, thou hast received. The gift of God which she had received was a divine gift; but she had received it wrongly. The Bible which Luther recovered for the church was one of God's greatest gifts; but the use which the Protestant church has made and is making of the Bible is a scandal and a blasphemy. Retain—hold fast—the faith once for all delivered unto the saints. Strengthen the things which remain, says Christ, and Repent. The church at Sardis had been backsliding. There was only one thing to do. It might hurt their pride; it might be unpopular; but her only hope was to make a clean breast of everything—Repent. That is the only course open for the Protestant church. It may hurt her pride, it will be awfully humiliating; but if she will repent of her backsliding He will heal her diseases.

There is one other word here needing to be emphasized: "Be watchful." The church in her controversy with Rome

lost her link of connection with the Word. The soul and its needs were neglected. The church protested—she separated herself from Rome. If Protestantism merely means separation from Rome, it is indeed a poor thing. Hence the writer says: Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain—faith in word, the redeeming power of grace, and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. The great doctrine of the Reformation, the doctrine which shook Europe, was Paul's doctrine of justification by Faith. Be watchful of that doctrine!

If the Protestant church will link herself onto the world and not to the Word—if she will have herself endowed and protected by the state, then she must suffer the consequences. If she will leave her first love and set her affection on the world, then must she suffer the sequel to the sin of the saints. If she will identify herself with the practices of the world, she must be content to suffer the doom of the world.

As the great day approaches the signs of that day will be seen by the Remnant—the faithful few—the "few names." They will see "the morning star." He will come to the world as a thief in the night; to the faithful, He will come as the morning star.

Today the cry is: "get together." Union is in the air. Anglo-Catholicism is progressing. Protestantism and the Papacy are flirting with each other. There is a marked tendency towards the reunion of Christendom. They are now making approaches; ultimately they will coalesce. As the end of the age approaches the 1,300 sects of Christendom will form one ecclesiastical merger. Already we see leadings.

But there is a Remnant—"Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." These were obscure and unknown. It has always been so with the faithful. The world feels it can despise them. There was a time when Eng-

land thought she could despise John Wesley and his followers. There was a time when London felt she could ridicule William Booth and his army. But they did not defile their garments and today they cannot be ignored or ridiculed.

In this letter there is no word of commendation for the *church*—there is for the *few* names. From now on Christ is not dealing with the church—He is dealing with the Remnant. Just as there was a time when God in His Providence ceased dealing with the race and began dealing with a family; so at this time in this age He ceases revealing Himself to the church and begins to reveal Himself to the Remnant. There is for them a glorious and blessed Hope.

"They shall walk with me in white for they are worthy." Only two of the Saints on earth have had this exquisite experience—Enoch walked with God and Noah walked with God. This indicates a remarkable degree of intimacy—it means a man is "far ben." This is to be the high privilege of the whole Remnant,—they shall all walk with Me for they are worthy.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. This is the livery of heaven, the garments of the saints.

"How bright those glorious spirits shine,
Whence all their bright array?
How came they to those blissful seats,
Of everlasting day?
Lo, these are they through suffering great
Who came to realms of light
And in the blood of Christ have washed
These robes which shine so bright."

"I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before the angels." Their names are already written there and their names will remain there. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints

is a most precious doctrine. "Whosoever shall confess me before men him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." There is no chance of the saints being lost. Once in Christ, in Christ forever. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Let me ask the reader: Is your name written in the book of life? If not, let me beseech you: go at once and say: Sir, write my name in that Book!

VI

BROTHERLY LOVE

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. —*Revelation 3: 7-13.*

BROTHERLY LOVE

Let us remember from whence and to what the church has fallen. We saw that the sin of the saints in the letter to the church of Ephesus—the apostolic church—was loss of love. The sequel to that sin was seen first in suffering Smyrna—the ten persecutions in church history. Having lost her love for the spiritual and heavenly things, the church in Pergamos set her heart on the world, as we see in church history when Constantine threw the protecting mantle of the state over the church. The next step in the sequel is seen in the letter to Thyatira, when the church of the middle ages settled down in the world and lost, almost entirely, her heavenly vision.

In all this we learn that the great heresy is the heresy, not of the head, but of the heart. The root of all apostasy is the loss of love. When that is lost in religious experience, all is lost.

The letter to the church in Sardis describes the Reformation in church history. At the Reformation, two streams were started—the one was a divine movement, the Reformation itself, which was a Revival of Religion; the other was a human movement, the Protestant church, or another phase of organized religion with its attendant evils.

These two streams run on to the end of the age. The divine movement is seen in the letter to the church in Philadelphia; the human movement is seen in the letter to the church in Laodicea. As Sardis came out of and was a protest against conditions in Thyatira, so Philadelphia came out of and was a protest against conditions in Sardis. Sardis is a protest against a corrupt church, Philadelphia is a protest against a dead church.

Philadelphia means brotherly love. The name is perpetu-

ated in the American city—let us hope the spirit is perpetuated there also. Philadelphia was the last Christian city to surrender to the "Terrible Turk." It got its name from two brothers —one of whom so loved the other that he was nicknamed Philadelphus. The city was frequently and, at times, violently, shaken by earthquakes. Consequently they could appreciate a city and a temple whose pillars could not be shaken. The road from the East to Rome lay alongside the city. Philadelphia was the "open door" through which the trade from East to West flowed. The city was strong from a military as well as a commercial point of view. The church in this city honored God and God honored the church—she was steadfast and enduring. Gibbon says: "Philadelphia alone has been saved, by courage or by prophecy. . . . Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect, amid a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same."

In church history, Philadelphia, the church of the "few names," is the church of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It embraces the great missionary enterprise which was started by such men as Carey, Morrison, Moffat and Livingstone; the great evangelical movements which were identified with Wesley, Whitfield, McCheyne, Bonar, Moody and Booth; and the great Bible conferences such as those held at Keswick, Mildmay, Dunblane, and the many centers in the United States and Canada.

All these movements originated away back among the Waldenses and the Albigenses—the Pietists and Quietists of Germany and France. The names of Spener, Frauke, Huss and Wycliffe are associated with these movements.

The movement with which we are dealing in this letter is not only a revival of religion, it is also a revival of doctrine—a

turning back to the old paths and the first love of which Jesus Himself is the source, the motive and the goal. The unity of the spirit is only seen among believers; brotherly love is only seen among those who are separated from the world unto Him. These lovers keep His Word, and do not deny His name. To them the door is open for service and testimony, and no man can shut it. To those who thus believe and love and hope, He is coming, and they will be kept from the hour of temptation.

The character in which Christ appears as the writer of this letter is not as the glorious One, but the One who is morally perfect—"He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth, and He that shutteth and no man openeth."

We shall look at these moral qualities one by one. "He that is holy." In its perfection this quality belongs only to God. In His presence even the angels are unholy and the sun itself has blemishes. He only is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. "He that is true." In the New Testament holy and true are divinely related and always go together. Holiness belongs to the subjective side of His character and truth to the objective. "He that hath the key of David." The first two qualities describe what Christ *is;* this tells us what He *does.* "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open." The "keys" refer to the things of eternity; this "key" refers to the things in time—it opens things on earth. Hence when Christ said, "Go ye into all the world," He also said, "all power is given unto me"—He had the key of David. This means He has power to open, to enter and exercise authority. He has the power to open the door for testimony and service, for grace and for blessing.

Man has sought and is seeking to abrogate and arrogate to

himself this divine power,—to open and to shut. Ecclesiastics are seeking to obtain and exercise that power in the Roman and Protestant churches. But He reserves that power to Himself. It was Christ who opened the door for Stephen, the first martyr, when he was being stoned, and who said, "I see the heavens open."

During the last hundred years, many doors and effectual have been supernaturally opened. The door into India, the door into Japan, the door into Korea, have all been opened, and Christ opened every one of them. He has opened many more doors and He is about to open the door into Tibet and the door into Afghanistan. Thank God, our missionaries were ready and entered in when the doors opened. We believe they will be ready to enter when these other doors open. He opens and no man shuts; but when He shuts no man can open. He closed the door for Jerusalem because she knew not the day of her visitation. This is the urgent and insistent appeal of foreign missions. The call is coming to us as clearly as it came to Isaiah: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" The door is open—who will go?

"Far, far away, in heathen darkness dwelling,
Millions of souls forever may be lost;
Who, who will go, salvation's story telling.
Looking to Jesus, counting not the cost?"

In the letter to Sardis, there is no word of commendation. It is all condemnation; because she walked with the world. In this letter there is no word of condemnation. It is all commendation; because she walked with God. In His words of commendation Christ affirms three things:

1. "Thou hast a little strength." It is small, but it is strength —it is not weakness. The true church is small—a few names—she is despised, she has little material influence, she has no wealth or social standing. In a word, Philadelphia is the op-

posite and antithesis of Sardis, but she is real, sincere and genuine. Her strength is little, but it is real; her influence is small, but it is good.

2. "Thou hast kept my word." Christ is referring here to some definite trial—a real test, during which she kept His Word. It costs to keep His Word. "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully," for the Word of the Lord endureth forever. "Whoso shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." One of the devil's objects today is to get God's children to let go God's Word. Paul Kanamori, the Japanese evangelist, charges the Christians of America with neglect of God's Word. In his own case the neglect of the Word let in German Rationalism and American Modernism which blighted his life for twenty years. What satisfaction to hear Christ say, Thou hast kept my word. Reader, have you kept it?

3. "Thou hast not denied my name." Christ is in heaven now. He said, "I go away," and He went. There are men who are loyal and brave when the great man is present; but when he leaves they turn traitors and cowards. What Christ refers to here is a denial of the living Word—His name. Knowledge of Christ comes from the Bible. Little or nothing can be known of Christ outside the Bible. To deny the written Word means, sooner or later, to deny the living Word. Attacks on the Word mean attacks on Christ—to deny the Bible means to deny Christ. But this Name is a Rock which will break the hammer. A friend once said to me: "No man ever maligned A. B. Simpson with impunity." "He reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

Because of the threefold fidelity of this church Christ confers on her three blessings:

1. "I have set before thee an open door." This means op-

portunity for service and this Christ has literally done and is doing. Paul said of Ephesus: "An effectual door is opened unto me." This opening was made by Him who opens and no man shuts. But Christ never does anything merely for the sake of doing it—there is a divine purpose in everything He does. "Unused opportunities are withdrawn." To him that hath shall be given and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.

2. "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet," i. e., the second blessing which He will confer upon them is: He will give them victory over their Jewish enemies. This letter and the one to Smyrna are the only two in which the Jews are mentioned. Christ says of the Jewish enemies of Smyrna: "they shall not prevail against her." Of the Jewish enemies of Philadelphia, Christ says: "they shall worship before her." That is what is taking place in all the evangelical churches today. The Jews are worshiping in the Christian churches. In proportion to the total population there are more Jewish converts to Christianity, by far, than there are of the heathen. Praise His name!

3. "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." Because of her steadfastness He will be with her in the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world. No doubt there is a reference here to various persecutions; but there is a primary reference to a wider and greater trouble; viz., "the great tribulation" which shall sweep over the earth when Christ comes for His saints. In every trial God provides for the saints a way of escape; but when the Tribulation breaks out then the church will be caught up in the Rapture to be

> "Forever with the Lord! Amen, so let it be;
> Life from the dead is in that word, 'tis immortality,
> Here in the body pent, absent from Him I roam,
> Yet nightly pitch my moving tent—
> One day's march nearer home."

In all this the saints are more than conquerors. "*Now* no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous: nevertheless *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." To the overcomers in this church—the evangelical missionary Christians of today—He promises a city. The magnitude and grandeur of that city is outlined in Revelation 21. In that city there are not only many mansions, there is a temple in which the overcoming saints will be made pillars. It is a great thing to be a pillar in the church here; what must it be to be a pillar in that temple? Further, God Himself is to be in that city—it is the city of my God. O friends, what a glorious hope!—what a blessed prospect for the saint! Eye hath not seen it, words fail to describe it.

"Eye hath not seen it, my gentle boy,
Ear hath not heard its sweet songs of joy.
Death cannot touch its fadeless bloom,
For beyond the grave and beyond the tomb,
It is there! It is there, my child."

VII

DEMOCRACY RUN MAD

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.—*Revelation 3: 14-19.*

DEMOCRACY RUN MAD

In this letter we are dealing with conditions in the Church as they exist today. The word Laodicea is taken from two Greek words: *laos,* meaning the people and *dikē,* meaning justice. It means, in current phraseology, "the rights of the people." It means an era of democracy, both in Church and state, when the slogan is heard ringing in our ears, *vox populi vox dei.* It is an era when the Church is dominated, not by the priests, but by the people. It is an era when imperialism and every form of aristocratic government is disappearing and the age of anarchy is upon us.

In these seven letters we have in outline the dawn, development and doom of organized religion, and the destiny of the Church. The beginnings of the doom of organized religion are seen in the letter to Laodicea; the beginnings of the destiny of the Church are seen in the letter to Philadelphia.

The root of the evil lay in the loss of love, and the cure of the evil is to be found in the revival of love. The element of evil which we saw in the letter to Thyatira reappears in the letter to Sardis and is perpetuated and perfected in the letter to Laodicea.

Every kind of tyranny is bad—whether in Church or state. The tyranny of the Popes and the priests has always been bad. But a worse tyranny still is the tyranny of the people. The phrase which the late President Woodrow Wilson coined "The world must be made safe for democracy," was given wide currency and became exceedingly popular. There are multitudes in the world today, however, who are saying—"The world must be made safe *from* democracy." The tyranny which we are threatened with at the present moment in the Church is the spirit of this ultra-democratic age.

In this Church—"the church of compromise,"—we have, in concentrated and crystalized form, all the evils of all the churches. The evil of the loss of love and neglect of first works we saw in Ephesus, the toleration of false teachers we saw in Pergamos, development of club and fraternity life we saw in Thyatira, the existence of deadness and defilement we saw in Sardis. In Laodicea we see, in some form, all of these evils. They have silted down among the people. The people pay the piper and they feel they have a right to call the tune. They are lost in the *business* of religion—they are taken up with trading, they are prepared to buy and sell anything, even their own immortal souls.

Let us pass on and examine the character in which the writer reveals himself in this letter. It appears in three aspects:—

1. He is the *Amen*—the last word. The one whose word no one disputes, diminishes or disannuls. He is the ultimate and final authority in everything in the universe—"I am the truth."

2. He is the *faithful and true witness*. He knows what He is talking about and He means what He says. He knows the truth and declares it. He is the one with eyes of flame—He sees everything, He sees beneath the surface. He is greater than our hearts and knows all things. He knows all our virtues and all our vices; and *we* know He knows. When He submits His evidence there is no cross-questioning, for His testimony is faithful and true. He bears this testimony in love, for He wants to save us from our sins.

3. He is the *beginning of the creation of God*. He is the fountain and source of all. He "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.....Who is the image of the invisible God, and the firstborn of every creature: For by Him were all things

created that are in heaven, and that are in earth.....He is before all things and by Him all things consist."

Such is the character of Him who writes this letter. "It is impossible to think any *man* could write this letter—least of all the apostle John. That were blasphemy of which he or any other man, were incapable." Let us stand in reverence and consider with due solemnity this divine declaration, delivered, not only to this local church, but to the Church universal.

The city in which this church was organized was famous for its large financial affairs and its industrial prosperity. It did an extensive trade in the manufacture of soft, glossy black wool, which came from a native breed of sheep. Laodicea had a well-known medical school whose professors were eye specialists. They also prepared a kind of eye salve which had wonderful curative powers. Near the city also were numerous warm water springs.

In this way the wording of the letter has a local coloring which is apparent and full of significance. The activities of the church too were influenced by the life of the city.

One of the most pathetic things in connection with this letter is that there is not a word of commendation. It seems the Church of the Laodiceans had sunk to the lowest depths of degeneracy. Not a single ray of light relieves the gloom which hangs over her. According to Charles Brown (who does not accept the prophetic interpretation of these letters), "this condemnation accurately covers a considerable amount of life which is in and around our churches today." If this is true —and I believe it is—then surely it behooves us carefully to consider the meaning and significance of this message.

According to the writer of this letter, this church was in a deplorable condition. In her own estimation, this church was

rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing. But He who *knows* her works says: "thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Further "thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

We can't imagine anything worse than that—deplorable and disgusting—indifferent, apathetic, careless and nauseating. No words can express more emphatically a hopeless church.

But the most pathetic aspect of this whole business is that this church did not know she was in such a state. "To know thyself is true progress" said the ancient Greeks. Knowledge of self is real knowledge, and ignorance of self is real ignorance. This church was shamefully ignorant of herself.

This was a church which lifted her face to high heaven and rolled her pious eyes as she said: "Lord I thank thee I am not as other churches. 'I am rich and have need of nothing' " and she knew not that she was poor and had need of everything. She was spiritually blind. She had no vision; and without a vision the Church will perish. This is a terrible case of self deception through vanity and conceit—"puffed up with windy pride."

Humanly speaking, this Church was eminently respectable. She was not guilty of any gross sin. There is no Nicolaitanism, there is no Balaamism here. We have escaped here from drunkenness and immortality, from bigotry and intolerance.

On the other hand, there is nothing here worthy of praise: no outstanding fidelity to the truth. There is not a word here about suffering or sacrifice for the Cause. It is not said of this church that she had kept His word and not denied His name.

In a word, we see here neither any great vice nor any great

virtue. This is a church whose Christ has no cross and whose members will have no crown.

This is the church as we see it today. There are, thank God, many notable exceptions; but organized religion today, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, is faithfully described in this letter. She may be orthodox or heterodox, evangelical or rational; but she is lukewarm and disgustingly indifferent. This is a church trying to carry on while she is living on a past experience—this is real obscurantism. She sees men dying in sin but she does not do a hand's turn to save them; she hears of millions of souls being lost, but she does not contribute more than a mite to send them the Gospel. Christ says of such a church: "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

One day the late Gen. Booth, while he was a member of this modern Laodicean church, was listening to an infidel soapbox orator declaring: "If I believed what you Christians say you do I would not rest day or night till I had told others about it." The words stung him, the shaft pierced his heart. He went home under deep conviction. The result was the Salvation Army was conceived and born; and today the Army is circling the earth to save men.

Christ says: "I counsel thee buy of me." The saints have to part with something they have in order to get something that Christ is ready to bestow. For the sinner, salvation is free; for the saint, sanctification means he must be prepared to serve and suffer and sacrifice. Let us see what this counsel of Christ means.

1. He offers the saint true riches as opposed to the false. These riches have been tested. Stephen tested them. All the Christian martyrs, since Stephen's day, have put these riches to the acid test. This gold has literally been made to pass through the fire and it has stood the test.

2. He offers the saint white raiment. I am speaking now of present-day, personal conditions in the Church. Our garments are spotted. But we can strip them off and get clean white ones to clothe our nakedness on easy terms. It is a shame for children of the king to be going about dressed as some of us are—we are dishonoring our Sovereign.

3. He offers the saint eye salve with which to anoint his eyes that he may see. That most gifted and cultured Englishman, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, wrote these autobiographical words: "For a great part of my life I did not know I was wretched and miserable and poor and naked and blind. Even after I knew it, I did not feel it aright. But, thank God, I feel it now somewhat as I ought to feel it. Pride: stand aside and let me see that ugly thing called *myself!* I have been deceived all my life by sayings of philosophers, by scraps of poetry, but most of all by the pride of my own heart, into an opinion of self-power which the Scriptures plainly tell me, and my repeated failures tell me, that I do not possess. It is the design of the religion of Jesus Christ to change men's views, to change their lives and to change their very tempers. Yes, but how? By the superior excellence of its precepts, by the weight of its exhortations or by the promise of its rewards? No, but by convincing men of their great blindness and helplessness. By inculcating the necessity of supernatural light and help, and by promising the penitent sinner and by actually conveying to him the evangelical blessings."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Never forget, "whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." We are dealing, all through these letters, and in this letter, with the sin of the saints—those whom the Lord loves, but who have lost their love for Him. To them He says: "Be zealous therefore, and repent." The Lord is chastening you in love.

The Church has not wakened up to this warning—Repent! Coleridge did, and many more individual saints have. Reader, the question is: Have *you,* whom the Lord loves and is chastening, have you seen your spotted garments, have you seen yourself as a backsliding saint and have you repented? "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent."

VIII

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.—*Revelation 3: 20-22.*

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

These last three verses of the third chapter of Revelation form a kind of epilogue to the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor.

As we make a survey of these letters and the corresponding periods in the entire history of the church certain great truths reveal themselves—some of them gladdening and some of them saddening truths.

The first of these truths is that good and evil are hopelessly mixed from the beginning to the end of the history of the church. Sometimes good predominates, and sometimes evil. Whenever good seed is sown, the devil sees to it that it is very soon oversown with evil. There has never been, and never will be, such a thing as a perfect church. No sooner was the church started at Pentecost than she began to leave her first love. As among the disciples there was a Judas, so among the first converts there was an Ananias and among the first servants there was a Demas. This is typical of the church and is true today. As in the days of Christ and the apostles, so in each period of church history there are scribes and Pharisees—hypocrites—to be found within their borders.

The second great truth which appears is that the good and the evil cannot be separated here. The parable of the tares and the wheat teaches this truth unmistakably. Men at all times have and now are foolishly wasting their time and their energy in attempting to separate the good from the evil in the church, in spite of the fact that God has forbidden it. Yet man will persist in this foolish and futile task, for the reason that man loves to do the forbidden task as our first parents loved to eat the forbidden fruit. The same parable also teaches that there will

come a time when the good and the evil in the church will be forever separated—and between them there will be a great gulf fixed.

The third truth which appears is that the evil in the church is cumulative and constantly increasing. Its forms vary and its advocates come and go, but the process goes on. This, to some, is an unacceptable truth, but it is nevertheless a fact. There are some poor mistaken people who, contrary to the teaching of Scripture, history and human experience, think that evil is gradually disappearing out of the organized church. These letters plainly teach us that there is a process going on in the church—but it is a process, not of the world being converted to the church, but of the church being converted to the world. There is great need today for the Christian to give good heed to the exhortation: "Be not conformed to the world."

The fourth truth which appears is that Christ passes judgment upon this evil—an evil which has rent, and is rending, the church of Christ. At one time the evil is Balaamism; at another time the evil is Nicolaitanism; at another time it is Laodiceanism. At one time the evil consists in the priests dominating the people; at another time the evil consists, as today, in the people dominating the priests—a church in which the teachings of the pulpit are moulded by the tastes and the demands of the pew. In these letters Christ passes judgment on and denounces each and all of these evils.

The fifth truth which appears is that there is in each church a faithful Remnant—a "few" who have not and will not bow the knee to Baal. These are the overcomers. They are mentioned, praised and rewarded all through the history of the church. They are more than conquerors through Christ who loved them.

In this connection I cannot allow this last chapter to proceed

further without again and afresh drawing attention to the cause of all this evil. It was the loss of love—the heresy of the heart, the sin of the saints, the failing of the fundamentalists—which led to such a sad and disastrous sequel.

Love is indeed the greatest thing in the world—"Now remaineth faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love."

"Hope shall to full fruition rise
And faith be sight above:
These are the means, but this the end
For saints for ever love."

Love is the fulfilling of the law. There are those, and always have been, who emphasize the importance of reason and scholarship—and no good purpose can be served by minimizing these. The watchword of such champions is Truth. They say: "Truth is truth and must be maintained." "Yes," replied Dr. Alex. Whyte, "Truth is truth but love is love.....Let error live rather than love die."

There is a little flower I know,
The sweetest flower that I have seen,
Which grows in lowly, loving hearts,
And thus we call it "Love" I ween.
It's never bought, it's never sold,
Yet every one a price must pay—
The heart must ne'er be dull nor cold
When this bright flower has come to stay.
It also has a work to do
(A charm and beauty of its own),
It works in this cold world of ours,
And does it all for love alone.

I am willing that everything I have written in these chapters should be forgotten, if, by the grace of God, this one sweet truth should be remembered—this one word "Love" should live in the heart.

During the late war the feelings of a powerful Empire were

gathered up and expressed in a "Hymn of Hate." It was unspeakably sad to think that hate should be harbored in the human heart. But when the church—when the child of God—loses its love that is infinitely sadder. All our trouble in the Christian church, all our discords in our Christian homes, all our tragedies in our Christian lives are due to the loss of this love.

Will you pardon me if I ask you this personal question: Have you lost that love? If you have, is that not the cause of all your trouble?

Love is not only the greatest thing in the world, it is the sweetest of the graces. The early apostolic church lost her love. Note what followed—suffering, sorrow, sadness, strife and untold misery. How much of these are in the world today, and all because love is lost! The human heart was made for God—and God is love—and it cannot find rest until it finds rest in Him.

As we read these seven letters, as we study these seven periods of church history, we see the sad sequel to the sin of the saints in Ephesus. Smyrna suffered and Pergamos began to love the world. The human heart, like nature, hates a vacuum; therefore having lost her love for the heavenlies, the church began to love the earthlies. Thyatira then lost herself in the love of the world. She lost sight of the mansions in the skies and began to build cathedrals and palaces on the earth. A fresh spiritual stream started at Sardis; but there were two streams at Sardis. The one was a spiritual stream, the great Reformation or Revival of religion; the other was a material stream—the organized Protestant church. These two streams run on to the end of the age. The spiritual stream is seen in Philadelphia—the evangelical and missionary movements: the material stream, is seen in Laodicea—the ritualism and rationalism of organized religion.

This sequel to the sin of the saints—as outlined briefly above—is indeed sad. But there is another aspect of it which is sadder still—an aspect which is expressed in the last three verses of chapter three. The greatest disaster of it all is that the sin of the saints has crowded out the Lord of love—Christ is shut outside His own church. At the end of the age we find Christ standing outside the closed door of the church. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me."

"O lovely attitude He stands
With melting heart and pleading hands.
Say weary heart, oppressed in sin,
May I come in—may I come in?"

This is what cold, callous, calculating, organized religion, in the hands of the devil's dupes during the centuries of this age of grace, has at last succeeded in doing—it has crowded and closed Christ outside the shut door of His own church. And, let me say, organized religion in the Protestant church is as guilty in this regard as organized religion in the Roman church. The one is older, more powerful and complete than the other but each, according to its capacity, has crowded and closed Christ outside His church. It is a mystery, but the fact is evident. Religion needs to be organized, and yet organization kills the spiritual in religion.

The church has lost her love for Christ; but Christ has not lost His love for the church. Praise His name!

Let us look for a moment at these wonderfully sweet and lovely verses. Of course there is here a tremendous appeal to the sinner. Christ stands at the door of every human heart and pleads with the sinner to let Him in.

"I've waited long, am waiting still,
You treat no other friend so ill."

But the primary appeal of these verses is to the saint who has lost his love, and to the church which has closed Christ out. Christ came unto His own and His own received Him not. It was a sad commentary on the civilization of the time that Mary the mother of Christ was shut out of the inn. But it is a thousand times sadder commentary on the civilization of our time that Christ, the son of Mary, is shut out of the church.

Let us face facts. There are millions of professing Christians who have shut Christ out of their affairs—their hearts, their homes, their offices, their warehouses and their workshops.

"Room for pleasure, room for business;
But for Christ the crucified—
Not a place that He can enter
In the heart for which He died."

And yet He stands at the door and knocks. He has "the keys of hell and of death." He is the One "that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." Yet He will not open this door, because this door must be opened from the inside. This door must be opened, not by the whole church, nor by a committee of the church. This door must be opened by an individual—"if any *man* will open the door."

The next spiritual awakening will be begun by some individual—have not all great spiritual awakenings been begun in that way? Moody's great work in Britain was begun in answer to a shut-in, praying saint in London. The Welsh Revival was started by a young girl. The one-by-one mission is always and by far the best—besides it is Scriptural. Take heart, lonely saint, and continue your secret ministry of intercession! Mass movements are only to be found outside the divine economy. As Dr. Wilbur Chapman says, the sinner is waiting for the "personal touch" from the saint who has not lost his love.

If some man will open the door Christ will come in and notice what will follow,—He makes certain promises to the overcomer—He will sit with him, He will sup with him and He will give him a throne. The overcomer will be made a priest and a king with God.

O what fellowship,
O what love divine!

If these things are true—and true they surely are—then what manner of persons ought we to be? He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Amen.

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